



Style of the Quarter Belgian Strong Ale

by Arlyn Johns



- » I take more of a traditionalist approach to producing these styles.
- » Mastering these techniques are a great foundation for experimentation.
- » You can always add dates, plums, pine needles, fire ants, etc. once you have the basics down.

BJCP Guidelines

18. Belgian Strong Ale

18A - Belgian Blond - Leffe Blond, Affligem Blond, Grimbergen Blond

- A moderate-strength golden ale that has a subtle Belgian complexity, slightly sweet flavor, and dry finish.
- Similar strength as a dubbel, similar character as a Belgian Strong Golden Ale or Tripel, although a bit sweeter and not as bitter.
- Often has an almost lager-like character, which gives it a cleaner profile in comparison to the other styles.
- Relatively recent development to compete with pilsners.

18B - Belgian Dubbel - Westmalle Dubbel, Koningshoeven Dubbel, Chimay Red

- A deep reddish, moderately strong, malty, complex Belgian ale.
- Most commercial examples are in the 6.5 – 7% ABV range.
- Dark counterpoint to Belgian Blond.
- Can be as simple as pils and caramelized syrup.
- Can also have a more complex grain bill.

18C - Belgian Tripel - Westmalle Tripel, Chimay Cinq Cents, St. Feuillien Tripel

- Strongly resembles a Strong Golden Ale but slightly darker and somewhat fuller-bodied.
- Usually has a more rounded malt flavor but should not be sweet.
- High in alcohol but does not taste strongly of alcohol.
- High carbonation and attenuation helps to bring out the many flavors and to increase the perception of a dry finish.

18D - Belgian Golden Strong - Duvel, Russian River Damnation, North Coast Pranzster

- A golden, complex, effervescent, strong Belgian-style ale.
- Strongly resembles a Tripel, but may be even paler, lighter-bodied and even crisper and drier.
- The drier finish and lighter body also serves to make the assertive hopping and spiciness more prominent.
- High carbonation helps to bring out the many flavors and to increase the perception of a dry finish.

18E - Belgian Dark Strong - Rochefort 10, St. Bernardus Abt 12, Gouden Carolus Grand Cru of the Emperor

- A dark, very rich, complex, very strong Belgian ale.
- Authentic Trappist versions tend to be drier (Belgians would say "more digestible") than Abbey versions, which can be rather sweet and full-bodied.
- Impression of a complex grain bill, although many traditional versions are quite simple, with caramelized sugar syrup or unrefined sugars and yeast providing much of the complexity.

Technique

Grist:

Good base malt is especially critical for the lighter tasting beers.
Belgian pils is sweeter, more aromatic and less grainy than German pils.
Domestic 2-row is inappropriate.
Same applies to extract - use a continental pilsner based extract.

Sugars:

Don't waste your money on Candi Sugar rocks - it's the same stuff sold at asian groceries but for 1/10th the price.
(Also, they add minimal flavor and color.)
Do waste your money on unrefined sugars (Muscavado, Demera, Turbinado, etc)
Especially waste your money on Dark Candi sugar syrup and soft candy (<http://darkcandi.com>).
Cane/corn sugar work well for lighter styles.

Hops:

These beers typically have a subtle but noticeable hop presence.
Noble hops, english hops, styrian goldings are all appropriate.
Saaz, Hallertau, Styrian Goldings are the trifecta.
Fruity, flowery, spicy and/or herbal.
Stay away from citrusy, resinous american hops.

Yeast:

Any belgian yeast will do
Resist the urge to ferment hot - you will get a lot of unpleasant fusel alcohols.
Pitch between 64-68.
Keep majority of the fermentation below 72.
WLP500/1214 - Chimay - Fruity, spicy (clove), bubblegum - very well behaved yeast.
WLP530/3787 - Westmalle - Bananna, custard, white pepper - Milder belgian character than others - furious fermenter
WLP540/1762 - Rochefort - Dark fruit, plum, prune, mild
WLP570/1388 - Duvel - Light pear ester - Will ferment very dry, but may take a bit longer to finish.
Handles higher temps (75-80) well.

Recipe Formulation

- Simplicity is key - In general keep it stupid simple
- Base malt, one character malt (5% or less) and sugar (5-20%).
- Crystal malt not really appropriate in lighter styles.
- Design your recipe around your yeast
- For example I sometimes like to add a little flaked oat to WLP530 to bring out the custard
- Styrian goldings orange marmalade compliment the pear esters of WLP570
- D2 candi syrup with WLP540 to enhance the dark fruit character
- Experiment with sugars - 10-20% of fermentables.
- Spices can be added but should not be recognizable as such
- Trappist styles are dryer and higher IBU, whereas commercial brands are sweeter and lower IBU's.
- Aim for 149 or lower mash temp
- All styles should finish moderately dry to very dry (80-85% AA - 90%+ for 18D)
- Shoot for the lower-mid end of gravity BJCP style guidelines

Example Recipes

All recipes are for 11 gallons and 80% efficiency.

Belgian Tripel

OG: 1.078 FG: 1.012 IBU: 36

21 lbs Belgian Pils malt
2 lbs Flaked wheat
2 lbs Blond soft candi sugar
2 lbs corn sugar
.5 lbs aromatic malt

75g 5.3% EKG @ 60 min (27 IBU)
25g Styrian Golding @ 30 min
20g Hersbrucker @ 30 min
25g Styrian Goldings @ 15 min
20g Hersbrucker @ 15 min
15g Styrian Goldings @ 0 min
15g Hersbrucker @ 0 min.
WLP530 or WYeast 3787

Mash at 152 for 1 hour.

Add sugars to kettle during runoff.

Boil 90 mins.

Recipe Formulation

Belgian Strong Golden

OG: 1.067 FG: 1.004 IBU: 33

18.5 lbs Belgian Pils malt
4 lbs corn sugar

62g 2.6% Saaz @ 60 min (12 IBU)
40g 5.2% Styrian Golding @ 60 min (15 IBU)
21g 2.6% Saaz @ 20 min
37g 5.2% Styrian Goldings @ 20 min
7g 2.6% Saaz @ 0 min
14g 5.2% Styrian Goldings @ 0 min

WLP570

Mash at 145 for 1 hour, 153 for 20 mins.
Add sugars to kettle during runoff.
Boil 90 mins.

Belgian Strong Dark

OG: 1.096 FG: 1.015 IBU: 32

25 lbs Belgian Pils malt
2.5 lbs flaked wheat
.75 lbs cara-vienne
.5 lbs cara-munich
3 lbs D2 candi syrup
1 lbs Dark soft candi sugar
1.5 lbs cane sugar

41g 8.1% Northern brewer @ 60 min (22 IBU)
57g 5.2% Styrian Goldings @ 30 min (10 IBU)

WYeast 1762

Other Resources

<http://darkcandi.com/>

<http://www.hopsdirect.com/>

<http://www.amazon.com/Brew-Like-Monk-Trappist-Belgian/dp/093738187X>

<http://www.northernbrewer.com/brewing/brewing-ingredients/sugars/belgian-candi-sugar>